

# VIRGINIA AGRICULTURAL COUNCIL PREPROPOSAL FORM

## **Title: Capacity-Building for Industry Leadership**

### **Background**

Although the agricultural sector has had steady production in recent years, numerous factors threaten future growth, including “production technology, consumer demand, energy, urban population growth, government policy, and the global economy” (Rephann, 2008, p. 4). These problems are imminently threatening and have been described as unprecedented, adaptive problems (Dick Crowder, personal communication – November 14, 2013). These problems are more than complicated; they are complex, novel, intractable, poorly structured, and without any obvious solutions (Grint, 2005). Agricultural communities need leaders to effectively address such problems; the success of the industry depends on these grassroots leaders who are faced with these challenges on a daily basis (Diem & Nikola, 2005; Horner, 1984).

Based on these facts, 12 focus groups (n=76) were conducted with Virginia (VA) agricultural industry leaders, commodity groups, young farmers and ranchers as well as Land-Grant University students and faculty. Participants in this study clearly noted that there must be strong leadership for the VA agricultural community to grow and prosper. Overall, participants had little doubt about the need for effective leaders and the need to develop more leaders for a successful future. As a result of these findings, the Virginia Agriculture Leadership Obtaining Results (VALOR) was established. This agricultural leadership development program addresses three focus areas identified by industry stakeholders: (a) knowledge of the changing industry; (b) relationship building across industry sectors; and, (c) practical, transferable skill development.

The mission statement of the VALOR Fellowship Program is to: “develop leaders who can effectively engage all segments of the Virginia agricultural community to create collaborative solutions and promote agriculture inside and outside of the industry.” The successful execution of this mission statement is dependent on the development of individuals through seminars and experiential modules designed to enhance knowledge, skill, reflective thought processes, and collaborative problem solving through shared experiences that are complementary, contradictory, and cumulative.

### **Objectives**

Based on this mission, we are requesting funding to support the VALOR educational program to accomplish the following goals 2015-2016:

1. Develop strategic relationships by visiting and engaging with over 150 agricultural producers to comprehend and address various needs of the industry.
2. Train 13 identified industry leaders to engage in crucial conversations with opponents of agriculture and provide opportunities to influence policy and legislation affecting our industry and the management of change.
3. Develop 13 leadership projects that will be implemented in rural/suburban communities to improve capacity and promote agriculture.

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## **Approach**

Strong leadership has often been cited as the competitive advantage or source of success for businesses and organizations. The same could be said for the agricultural industry as a whole. A recent study that investigated the return on investment for agricultural leadership development programs is 140 percent (ROI, 2013). In order to develop such leadership the VALOR program includes interaction with agriculture stakeholder groups in Virginia within overarching topics relevant to our industry and the issues it faces to remain viable. For example, a single seminar exposes participants to producers of pork, soybeans, cotton, peanuts, wheat, produce, forestry and aquaculture in one part of the Commonwealth while also speaking to experts in equipment manufacturing, agricultural technologies, market product development, policy development and regulatory issues, domestic and global trade, environmental issues, industry promotion, and interpersonal skills required for today's Ag leaders. Additionally, seminars include six Virginia-based seminars, two addressing policy development and regulatory agency issues at the state and national level, and two that compare approaches at US Regional and international levels in markets that provide opportunity for production and marketing efforts in Virginia.

## **Justification and Budget**

During 2012-2014, over 200 individuals, businesses, and groups — from across the Commonwealth — contributed monetary and in-kind support for the program. Presently, the administration of the program is supported by a full-time position and part-time graduate student provided by Virginia Cooperative Extension. The budgeted cost for the current cohort to complete their two-year fellowship is \$195,000. In order to continue the success and sustainability of the program, which was identified as a need by the industry — monetary support is needed. We are requesting \$9,750 per year (10%). Program sponsors receive recognition of support in printed and online materials

## **Economic impact**

VALOR's economic impact on Virginia agriculture is estimated at \$75,000 annually in volunteer time in the industry, and additional return-on-investment with skills related to industry engagement, business succession and development, legislative impact, rural and urban leadership with an understanding of agriculture, consumer education, and global perspectives of agriculture. Each fellow benefits from a \$20,000 two-year experience and decades of advanced application of skills and knowledge for a \$5,000 investment plus time for seminars and industry activities.

In addition to agricultural knowledge and interpersonal skill development, program participation has a direct positive impact in areas of career progression, business growth, continued education (formal and non-formal), network and community development, personal development, and community leadership (George Morris Center, 2013). Additional value to the state results from opportunities embraced by graduates of these programs, including public service in local and state government, service on commodity and agricultural agency boards, and public and private sector associations in agricultural and related industries.

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INVESTIGATOR(S)\*    Megan M. Seibel, PhD   

DURATION (years) one        two   X  

BUDGET (yr. one)   \$9,750    (total)   \$19,500   

\*One pre-proposal per PI please

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COMMODITY GROUPS	CHECK <i>ONE</i> GROUP THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PROJECT
Aquaculture	
Fruit/Wine	
Livestock Dairy Poultry Hogs Beef Sheep Goats Horses	
Nursery/ Forestry	
Row Crops	
Turf/Seed	
Vegetable	
Educational	X
Miscellaneous Agriculture	